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A new species of *Androctonus* Ehrenberg, 1828 from the Tassili n'Ajjer, Algeria (Scorpiones: Buthidae)

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Tassili n'Ajjer;
Algeria.

Abstract. – A new species of *Androctonus* Ehrenberg, 1828 is described on the basis of one male specimen collected in Eferi, at the foothills of the Tassili n'Ajjer massif, Wilaya of Djanet, Algeria. This new scorpion taxon represents the 42nd known species of the genus *Androctonus* and the 7th reported from Algeria. A geographical distribution map of the *Androctonus* species occurring in the region of the Saharan Mountain ranges of Algeria and Niger is presented.

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Introduction

Since the monographic work of Vachon (1952) on North African scorpions, the scorpion fauna of Algeria has been the subject of several studies, leading to an increasing number of new species as well as a new genus (Abidi *et al*., 2021; Bouisset & Larrouy, 1962; Khammassi *et al*., 2023; Lourenço, 2001, 2002a,b, 2006, 2010, 2013a,b, 2017; Lourenço & Leguin, 2011, 2014; Lourenço & Rossi, 2015, 2016; Lourenço & Sadine, 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2021; Lourenço *et al*., 2016, 2017, 2018a,b, 2020; Sadine *et al*., 2016, 2024; Ythier, 2022; Ythier *et al*., 2021, 2024). Although the core Saharan region, defined by Vachon (1952) as the 'central compartment', has been the subject of many studies, other regions in the peri-Saharan zone (surrounding most of the central compartment) also called the attention of scorpiologists, such as the Saharan massifs of Tassili n'Ahaggar (Hoggar) and Tassili n'Ajjer in the South of Algeria. The patterns of distribution of North African scorpions including the role of refugia represented by the Saharan massifs for scorpion species less well adapted to xeric environments have already been discussed in several recent papers (*e.g.* Lourenço, 2001, 2002, 2010, 2013; Lourenço & Leguin, 2014; Lourenço & Rossi, 2015, 2016; Ythier, 2021; Ythier *et al*., 2021, 2024) so it will not be further commented here.

In his contributions to the study of North African scorpions, Pallary (1928, 1929) described two *Androctonus* species from the Saharan massifs of southern Algeria. The first one, *Androctonus eburneus* (Pallary, 1928) (= *Prionurus eburneus* Pallary, 1928), was described on the basis of two specimens collected in Djanet, in the Tassili n'Ajjer massif. Vachon (1952) raised doubts about the validity of this small yellowish species but without taking any decision on its status since he was not able to study the type material. He then placed this species in the synonymy of *A. amoreuxi* (Audouin,1826) based of new material collected in Djanet (Vachon, 1955). Lourenço (2008) was finally able to locate the type material in the collections of the Muséum national d'Histoire naturelle of Paris, France (MNHN) and the analysis of such material revealed that this species was different from *A. amoreuxi*, so it was revalidated. It should be noted that Mousaid & Tang (2024) recently stated that "*a specimen (MNHN-RS-RS2026) under the name "Androctonus amoreuxi Audouin & Savigny, 1825" was allegedly considered the holotype of A. amoreuxi from Djanet, Algeria, by the National Museum of Natural History, Paris, France*". It is obviously a mistake on the website of the MHNH, due to the fact that *A. eburneus* was previously synonymized with *A. amoreuxi* (type originally from Egypt, now lost) and this mistake will soon be corrected (E.-A. Leguin in litt.).

Androctonus hoggarensis (Pallary, 1929) (= *Prionurus hoggarensis* Pallary, 1928) was the second species described, based on specimens (number not indicated and types not designated) collected in the Hoggar massif. This large dark brown to blackish species was later

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also collected in the Tassili n'Ajjer massif as well as in the Aïr massif in northern Niger. However, Vachon (1952) called the attention to the population distributed in the Aïr massif, differing by a smaller size and a different coloration. New material collected in the Aïr massif and its comparison with specimens of *A. hoggarensis* from Hoggar and Tassili n'Ajjer massifs confirmed the existence of distinct characters allowing Lourenço (2015) to describe this population as a separate species, *Androctonus santi* Lourenço, 2015.

The study of an *Androctonus* specimen recently collected in Eferi, at the foothills of the Tassili n'Ajjer massif, Wilaya of Djanet, and its comparative analysis with other *Androctonus* species occurring in the region, has led to the description of another new species, *Androctonus ajjer* **sp**. **n**., confirming again that the Saharan Massifs are biodiversity hot spots with a very high degree of endemism within the Sahara Desert. This new species seems to show affinities with *A. amoreuxi*, distributed in Algeria in the core region of the Sahara, extending up to the Algerian Saharan massifs to the South (Fig. 13). Both species can however be easily distinguished by several morphological features. As previously mentioned, in its note synonymizing *A. eburneus* with *A. amoreuxi*, Vachon (1955) studied material of *A. amoreuxi* from Djanet. He suggested that morphological variations in *A. amoreuxi* could lead to its division in several forms (as already suggested in Vachon, 1952 and later confirmed with the description of several new species from the peri-Saharan zone, previously associated with *A. amoreuxi*). For the population of Djanet, he indicated several different morphological characters which correspond to the new species described here, notably the length of lateral inframedian carinae of metasomal segment II, shape of the scalloping of the proximal dentate margin of fixed finger in male, male pectinal tooth count, and especially a less slender metasoma with bigger spinoid granules posteriorly on segments III-IV (especially well visible on segment IV in Fig. 1 of Vachon, 1955). It therefore appears that the *Androctonus* population of Djanet examined by Vachon (1955) most certainly corresponds to the new species described here.

Material and methods

Illustrations and measurements were produced with the aid of a Motic DM143 digital stereomicroscope with an ocular micrometre. Habitus photographs were made with a Canon EOS RP and Adobe Photoshop software. Map was made using maps-for-free.com and Adobe Photoshop software. Measurements follow Stahnke (1970) and are given in mm. Trichobothrial notations follow Vachon (1974) and morphological terminology mostly follows Vachon (1952) and Hjelle (1990). Material studied herein is deposited in the collections of the MNHN (Muséum national d'Histoire naturelle), Paris, France.

Taxonomic treatment

Family **Buthidae** C. L. Koch, 1837

Genus ***Androctonus*** Ehrenberg, 1828

Composition of the genus *Androctonus* in Algeria (in order of description)

- *A. australis* (Linnaeus, 1758)
- *A. amoreuxi* (Audouin,1826)
- *A. aeneas* C. L. Koch, 1839
- *A. liouvillei* (Pallary, 1924)
- *A. eburneus* (Pallary, 1928)
- *A. hoggarensis* (Pallary, 1929)
- *A. ajjer* **sp**. **n**.

***Androctonus ajjer* sp. n.**

(Fig. 1-10)

ZooBank: https://zoobank.org/D740E1BF-147C-4F1F-BCD3-7072EC5225A7

Holotype, ♂, Algeria, Djanet Wilaya, Eferi, foothills of the Tassili n'Ajjer, 1010 m a.s.l., 42°29'N - 009°29'E, 09/XI/2022 (Y. Alioua). Type material deposited in the collections of the Muséum national d'Histoire naturelle, Paris, France.

Etymology. – The specific name is placed in apposition to the generic name and refers to Tassili n'Ajjer (Tassili of the Kel Ajjer Tuareg confederation), where the new species was collected.

Diagnosis. – Scorpion of large size for the genus, with a total length of 87.26 mm for the male holotype. General coloration yellowish to brownish yellow; metasomal segments IV-V and telson with dark pigmentation; legs pale yellow. Metasomal segments I-IV of approximately the same width, with a moderately to strongly marked dorsal depression; dorsal carinae strongly marked with granules becoming spinoid posteriorly; segments III-IV with one bigger posterior spinoid granule. Anal arc composed of 14 ventral teeth and four lateral lobes. Fixed and movable fingers with 12 rows of granules. Leg retrolateral basitarsal spurs with basal tooth simple. Pectines with 31-33 teeth in male holotype; fulcra with 6-7 macrosetae externally and one microseta internally.

Description based on male holotype (morphometric measurements after the description)

Coloration (in alcohol). – Basically, yellowish to brownish yellow. Prosoma: carapace yellowish orange; eyes marked with dark pigment. Mesosoma yellowish orange without spots; carinae not pigmented. Metasomal segments I-III yellowish to yellowish orange, IV-V yellowish orange with brownish (IV) to dark brown (V) pigmentation; carinae pigmented from II-V, especially ventrally; telson vesicle yellowish with dark brown pigmentation, aculeus yellowish orange at its base and blackish at its extremity. Venter yellowish; genital operculum and pectines paler than the other zones. Chelicerae yellowish without any spots; fingers yellowish with dark red teeth. Pedipalps yellowish orange; fingers with the oblique rows of granules dark red. Legs pale yellow without spots.

Morphology. – Carapace moderately granular; anterior margin almost straight, slightly concave. Carinae moderately to strongly marked; anterior median, central median and posterior median carinae strongly granular, other carinae moderately granular. All furrows weak. Median ocular tubercle located slightly anterior to the centre of the carapace; eyes separated by about three ocular diameters; five pairs of lateral eyes, the first three of moderate size, the last two reduced. Sternum triangular and narrow, longer than wide. Mesosoma: tergites moderately granular. Three longitudinal carinae moderately crenulate on tergites I to VI; tergite VII pentacarinate with carinae moderately to strongly crenulate. Venter: genital operculum divided longitudinally, each plate with an oval shape. Pectines: pectinal tooth count 31-33 in male holotype; middle basal lamella of the pectines not dilated; fulcra with 6-7 macrosetae externally, one microseta internally. Sternites III-VI with elongated spiracles, almost smooth with only some minute granules laterally; sternites III-V acarinate, VI with four vestigial carinae; sternite VII with four moderate carinae and minute granulation on whole surface except between central carinae. Metasomal segments I-IV of approximately the same width (not enlarged posteriorly), with a smooth and moderately to strongly marked dorsal depression; segment I with ten complete carinae, crenulated; segments II to IV with eight complete carinae, strongly crenulated; lateral inframedian carinae represented by 10-12 granules on distal two thirds of segment II, by 2-3 granules on III, absent on IV; dorsal carinae strongly marked with granules becoming spinoid posteriorly, segments III-IV with one bigger posterior spinoid granule; segment V with five carinae; the latero-ventral carinae strongly crenulate with several lobate denticles; ventral median carinae not divided posteriorly; anal arc composed of 14 ventral teeth and with four lateral lobes; all metasomal segments with intercarinal spaces slightly granular to smooth and a weak setation. Telson with some moderate granulations ventrally; aculeus moderately curved and of about same size as the vesicle, without a subaculear tubercle. Cheliceral dentition as defined by Vachon (1963) for the family Buthidae; external distal and internal distal teeth approximately the same length; ventral aspect of both fingers and manus covered with long dense setae. Pedipalps with a weak setation; femur

Fig. **1-2**. *Androctonus ajjer* **sp**. **n**., ♂ holotype, habitus. **1**. Dorsal aspect. **2**. Ventral aspect.

pentacarinate; patella with 7 carinae but only dorso-internal and internal are well marked; other carinae are weak to vestigial; chela with vestigial carinae; all faces very weakly granular to smooth; fixed and movable fingers with 12 rows of granules, internal and external accessory granules present, strong; two accessory granules on the distal end of the movable finger next to the terminal denticle; scalloping of the proximal dentate margin of fixed finger in male. Legs: tarsus with numerous thin setae ventrally, arranged in more or less two rows; tibial spur moderate on legs III and IV; basitarsal spurs moderate to strong on legs I to IV; retrolateral basitarsal spur with basal tooth simple (not bifid). Trichobothriotaxy: trichobothrial pattern of Type A, orthobothriotaxic as defined by Vachon (1974). Dorsal trichobothria of femur arranged in **β** (beta) configuration (Vachon, 1975).

Morphometric measurements (mm) of the male holotype.

– ***Total length***: 87.26.

– ***Carapace***
length 9.50;
anterior width 5.63;
posterior width 10.63.

– ***Mesosoma***: length 23.0.

– ***Metasomal segments***
I: length 6.75; width 6.75;
II: length 7.88; width 6.88;
III: length 8.50; width 7.13;
IV: length 10.13; width 6.88;
V: length 11.0; width 6.25; depth 5.25.

– ***Telson***: length 10.5.

– **Vesicle**: width 3.94; depth 3.19.

– ***Pedipalp***
femur length 7.63; width 2.88;
patella length 8.88; width 4.38;
chela length 16.63; width 4.13; depth 4.88;
movable finger length 10.63.

Relationships. – By its general morphology, size and coloration, *Androctonus ajjer* **sp**. **n**. shows similarities with *A. amoreuxi*, described from Egypt and distributed in Algeria in the core region of the Sahara, extending up to the Algerian Saharan massifs to the south (Fig. 13).

The new species can however be readily distinguished by the following main features:

(**i**) metasomal segments I-IV with a moderately to strongly marked dorsal depression (reduced in *A. amoreuxi*);

(**ii**) dorsal carinae strongly marked with granules becoming spinoid posteriorly, segments III-IV with one bigger posterior spinoid granule (small rounded granules in *A. amoreuxi* and no pronounced posterior spinoid granules);

(**iii**) movable finger with 12 rows of granules (13-14 in *A. amoreuxi*);

(**iv**) distinct type of habitat (*A. amoreuxi* is distributed in the deserts of the core Saharan region, generally under 1000 m a.s.l.). The *Androctonus* population of Djanet examined by Vachon (1955) most certainly corresponds to the new species described here (see Introduction).

Androctonus ajjer **sp**. **n**. can also be easily distinguished from the other *Androctonus* species distributed in the Saharan massifs, notably by the following main features:

- *A. eburneus* described from Djanet:

(**i**) much smaller overall size with 47.6 mm in adult male lectotype (87.26 in the new species);

(**ii**) lighter general coloration, without darker pigmentation on metasoma and telson;

(**iii**) higher pectinal tooth count with 38-37 teeth in male lectotype (31-33 in the new species);

(**iv**) movable finger with 13 rows of granules (12 in the new species).

- *A. hoggarensis*, described from the Hoggar Massif (Tassili n'Ahaggar) and also distributed in the Tassili n'Ajjer:

(**i**) general coloration dark brown to blackish (yellowish to brownish yellow in the new species);

(**ii**) fixed and movable fingers with 13 and 14-15 rows of granules, respectively (12 in the new species);

(**iii**) leg retrolateral basitarsal spurs with basal tooth bifid (simple in the new species);

(**iv**) distinct type of habitat (*A. hoggarensis* is a mountain species that lives at high altitude, generally between 1200-2000 m a.s.l.).

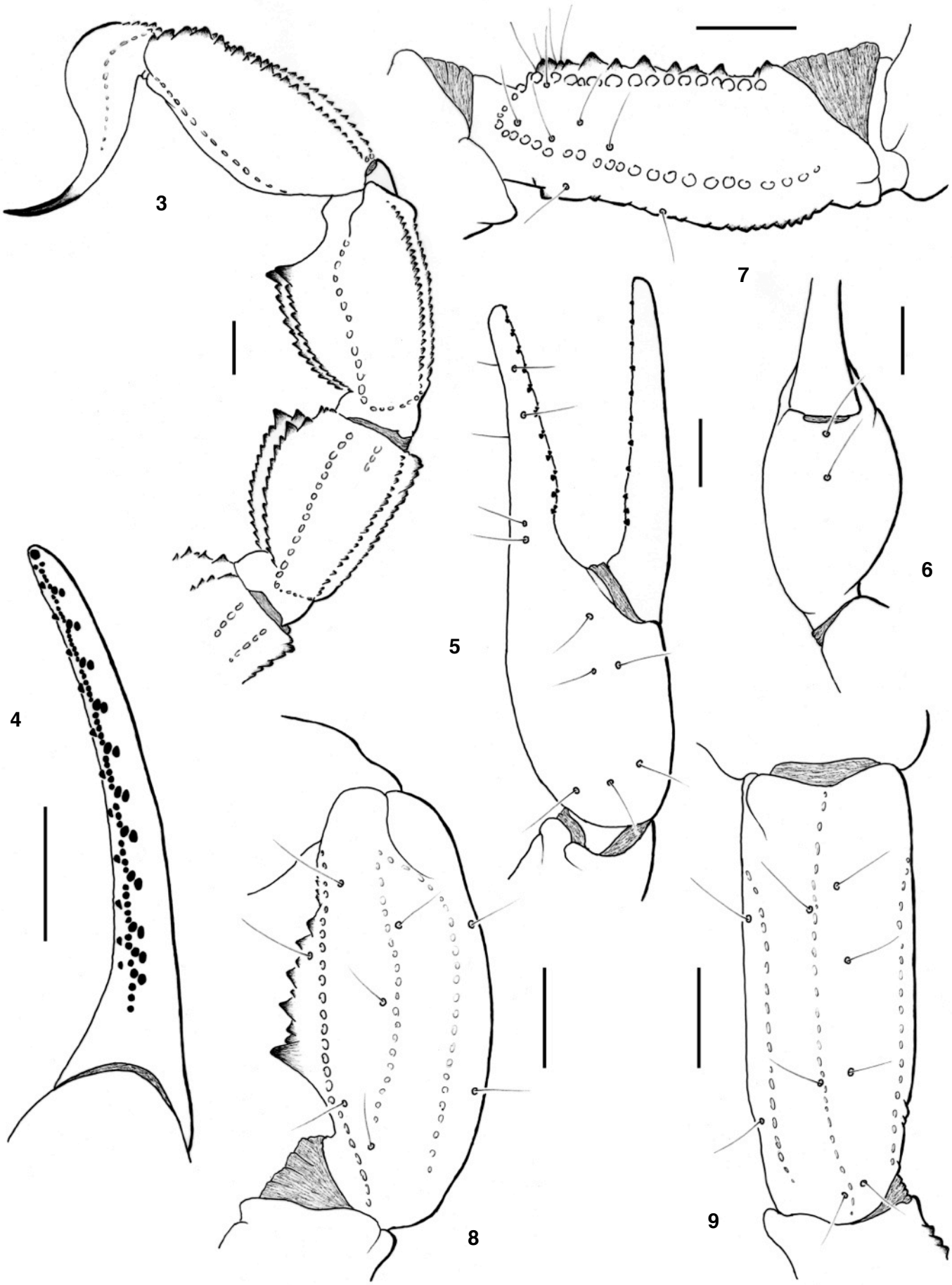

Fig. **3-9**. *Androctonus ajjer* **sp**. **n**., male holotype (Scale bars: 2 mm).

3. Metasomal segments III-V and telson, lateral aspect. **4**. Cutting edge of chela movable finger. **5-9**. Trichobothrial pattern. **5-6**. Chela, external (**5**) and ventral (**6**) aspects. **7**. Femur, dorsal aspect. **8-9**. Patella, dorsal (**8**) and external (**9**) aspects.

Fig. **10**. *Androctonus ajjer* **sp**. **n**., male holotype alive in its natural habitat.

- *A. santi*, described from the Aïr Massif:

(**i**) smaller overall size with 65-70 mm in adult males (87.26 in the new species);

(**ii**) general coloration dark brown to blackish (yellowish to brownish yellow in the new species);

(**iii**) distinct type of habitat (*A. santi* is a mountain species that lives at high altitude (recorded between 1200-1600 m a.s.l.) in the Aïr Massif, separated from the Hoggar and Tassili n'Ajjer massifs by arid plains) (Fig. 13).

Finally, *Androctonus ajjer* **sp**. **n**. can be distinguished from *A. australis*, distributed in Algeria between the high plateaus to the north, extending up to Ghardaïa and Ouargla to the south, notably by the following main features:

(**i**) metasomal segments strongly enlarged posteriorly (approximately the same width in the new species);

(**ii**) movable finger with 14 rows of granules (12 in the new species);

(**iii**) leg retrolateral basitarsal spurs with basal tooth bifid (simple in the new species);

(**iv**) anal arc with three lateral lobes (four in the new species);

(**v**) pectines with fulcra bearing one macroseta internally (one microseta in the new species).

Ecological characteristics of the type locality. – The region of Djanet is located on a geological fault at the far southeast of Algeria, forming a sandstone cliff that rises along the western edge of Oued Edjériou. These sandstones have preserved the traces of significant geological and climatic events that the region has experienced (orogeny, glaciation, volcanism, marine transgressions and regressions, sedimentation, fluvial and aeolian erosion) (Dubief, 1999). The region is now dominated by dune fields or ergs that crown and envelop the Tassili n'Agger foothills, which are signs of increasingly growing aridity (Beddiaf, 2020). The factor exacerbating this aridity is the rainfall, which is low (around 20mm/year) and irregular, with the months receiving the most rain being September (3.5 mm) and March (2.7 mm) (Abdoun, 2002). The temperature is relatively stable, with an average temperature of over 31.1°C, a minimum temperature of 1.1°C recorded in January, and a maximum temperature of 32.6°C recorded in August (Beddiaf, 2020). Eferi, the type locality of *Androctonus ajjer* **sp**. **n**., is an urban area surrounded by sandblasted cliffs, interspersed with date palm orchards and other crops, contributing to the improvement of the relative humidity in this desert region (Fig. 11-12).

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Fig. **11-12**. Habitat of *Androctonus ajjer* **sp**. **n**. in Eferi, Djanet Wilaya, Algeria.

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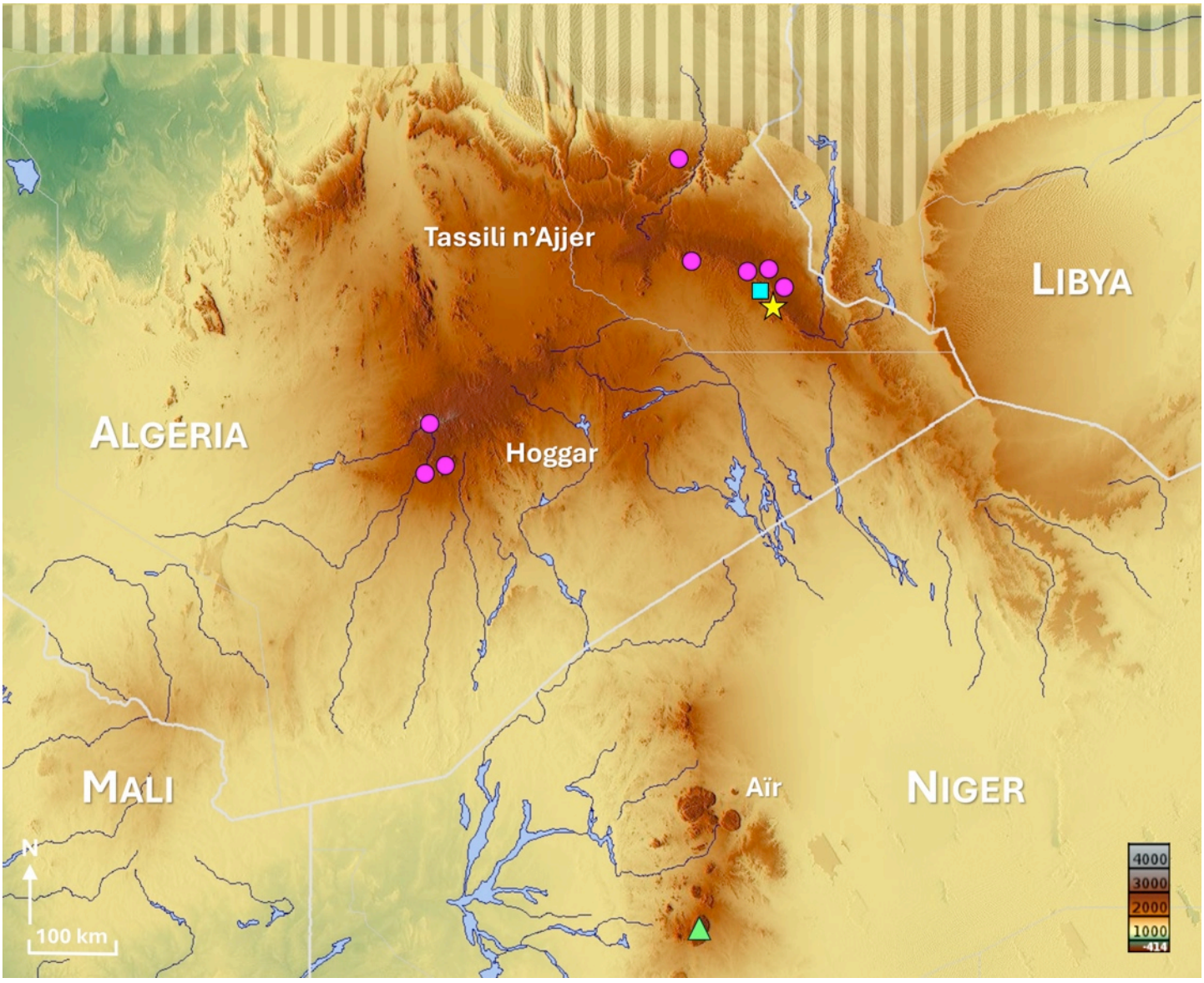

Fig. **13**. Topographic map of the three Saharan Mountain ranges of Tassili n'Ajjer, Hoggar and Aïr showing the approximate distribution of the *Androctonus* species known from this region, based on material examined and literature.

A. amoreuxi (black and white dashed area), *A. eburneus* (blue square), *A. hoggarensis* (pink circle), *A. santi* (green triangle) and *A. ajjer* **sp**. **n**. (yellow star).

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Author of the figures. – EY (Fig. 1-9, 13), SS (Fig. 10), YA (Fig. 11-12).

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Résumé

Ythier E., Sadine S. E., Alioua Y. & Lourenço W. R., 2025. – Une nouvelle espèce d'*Androctonus* Ehrenberg, 1828 du Tassili n'Ajjer en Algérie (Scorpiones: Buthidae). *Faunitaxys*, 13(08): 1 – 8.

Une nouvelle espèce appartenant au genre *Androctonus* Ehrenberg, 1828 est décrite sur la base d'un spécimen mâle collecté à Eferi, au pied du massif du Tassili n'Ajjer, Wilaya de Djanet, Algérie. Ce nouveau taxon représente la 42ème espèce d'*Androctonus* décrite à ce jour et la septième connue pour l'Algérie. Une carte de la distribution des espèces d'*Androctonus* présentes dans la région des massifs montagneux du Sahara d'Algérie et du Niger est présentée.

Mots-clés. – Scorpion, Buthidae, *Androctonus*, *ajjer*, taxonomie, nouvelle espèce, description, morphologie, massifs Sahariens, Tassili n'Ajjer, Algerie.

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Illustration de la couverture :

Tassili n'Ajjer landscape (photo: Djaren-Sefar).

Crédits:

Eric Ythier : Fig. 1-9 & 13.
Salah Eddine Sadine : Fig. 10.
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